

TO: Business/Labor Reporters/Columnists/Producers/Editors  
FR: Scott Widmeyer, Widmeyer Communications  
RE: Al Shanker Biography/ Story and column angles for consideration

The typical Labor Day story line depicts the continuing decline of American trade unions, but this Labor Day brings a different twist: release of a new biography of labor titan Albert Shanker, whose union (the American Federation of Teachers) nearly tripled membership during his leadership, from 1974-1997.

In September, Columbia University Press will publish *Tough Liberal: Albert Shanker and the Battles Over Schools, Unions, Race and Democracy*, by Richard D. Kahlenberg. The book examines Shanker's role as a founding father of modern teacher unionism in New York City in the early 1960s and his transition to a leader who demanded more of his members beginning in the 1980s as criticism of education increased.

Possible hooks for story coverage include:

- Shanker began organizing teachers at a time when people thought it was impossible to organize professionals (who considered unions beneath them) and public employees (who were forbidden by law from striking). How was Shanker able to overcome those obstacles and in what areas of the workforce might his example be replicated today?
- What lessons can union leaders learn from Shanker's success in building his union at a time of general decline among organized labor? How important was his emphasis on educational quality to expanding the union? How important was communication, including his legendary "Where We Stand" column in the *Sunday New York Times*?
- After the near-bankruptcy of New York City in 1975, Shanker began to form an alliance with business leaders to push for higher quality education. How common is that labor-business alliance today?

Knowledgeable sources for such stories, in addition to Kahlenberg, include:

- Ed McElroy, President, AFT
- Randi Weingarten, President UFT
- Linda Chavez, political commentator and former AFT publications editor
- Tom Donahue, former secretary-treasurer and president of the AFL-CIO
- Bob Wehling, former Procter & Gamble senior executive
- Jay Kriegel, New York City business leader
- Richard Ravitch, New York City civic leader

Kahlenberg's unauthorized biography of Shanker is the first to offer a complete narrative of the man who was one of the most important voices in organized labor, public education and American politics in the last quarter century.

### **Author's Biography**

Richard D. Kahlenberg is a senior fellow at The Century Foundation and the author of *All Together Now: Creating Middle Class Schools Through Public School Choice*; *The Remedy: Class, Race, and Affirmative Action*, and *Broken Contract: A Memoir of Harvard Law School*. Previously, Kahlenberg was a Fellow at the Center for National Policy, a visiting association professor of constitutional law at George Washington University, and a legislative assistant to Senator Charles S. Robb (D-VA). Kahlenberg's articles have appeared in *The New York Times*, *The Washington Post*, *The Wall Street Journal*, *The New Republic* and elsewhere. Kahlenberg has appeared on ABC, CBS, CNN, FOX, C-SPAN, MSNBC and NPR. Kahlenberg graduated magna cum laude from Harvard College in 1985 and cum laude from Harvard Law School in 1989. Between college and law school, he spent a year at the University of Nairobi School of Journalism as a Rotary Scholar. He lives with his wife, Rebecca, and four daughters outside Washington, D.C.

MEDIA CONTACT: ADAM SHAPIRO  
WIDMEYER COMMUNICATIONS  
202-667-0901  
Adam.Shapiro@widmeyer.com